

## **The God of Hope and our Future      Jeremiah 29:4-14**

What hope do we have in this life? What does my future hold? Do I have a future purpose? Is there a future for us in this- what hope is there here? These are questions that people often think of, ask or want answered, and will go through their logical and rational thinking processes in an attempt to work out possible answers, and will go even further, to much greater lengths it would seem in their endeavours to find out, when your own thinking and logic doesn't go far enough. Such desires have tragically helped create in our world the huge industries based around the likes of horoscopes and fortune telling, psychics and mediums along with a number of other occult practices which would want us to believe that these industries, businesses and practices can actually reveal what the future might hold for someone and therefore what hope there is in their life.

But when it comes to the God of the Bible, the Lord Almighty, God is not a fortune teller and does not need to be, in order to reveal his plans for his people, plans which have always been to prosper them by bringing them shalom-peace, giving them hope and a future.

Verse 11 from our reading this morning in the Church is a reasonably well known scripture that believers will quote or have it in a pretty picture, plaque or wall hanging in your home or office- it's a popular and well-known, used and referred to verse. To start with we will put this verse in the context of Jeremiah 29. This passage of scripture is a declaration for a nation, over a people the nation of Israel who are now in exile for 70 years. So we can't just pull this one out and point blank apply it to our personal lives today without considering the context. When we believe, speak or pray this verse as an individual today it is in the context of something bigger- the family of God, God's people, the body of Christ even.

We often make our plans ourselves and within those self-made plans our human tendency is to make ourselves central. And then what we do is... I take these self centred self made plans and put them on God which is effectively telling God, "Well here are my plans God, so now you get to it and do them". And just how should we expect God to respond to his children, his people. I think this phrase I heard this week pretty much sums up the Lord Almighty's response to such a person or people, "If you want to make God laugh, tell him your future plans."

If we project what we believe onto God to be true, then, we stand to miss out on what God has for us.

Rick Warren said, ‘The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfilment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It’s far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions.’ The point then that I am attempting to make here then is that: Your prosperity, your hopes, your future only becomes meaningful and powerful when you invite God to become the author of it. The one and only source, the one who creates and instigates the plans to give us his hope for our future.

And that has a strong bearing on your and my situation right here right now in this church whether you are healthy or sick, rich or poor, young or old, single or married... God does have plans for you and importantly, not only as his children, but as his people! And What God desires is this:  
To bring us peace/shalom, as individuals, households and a church;  
To give or fill us with hope; and with it  
A Future, as his people together committed to following him... How?

In the context of v11, the reality of your life and circumstance, has God ever seemed to be hidden, absent, unavailable and therefore ineffective, impudent even? That’s what the Lord must have seemed to be to the exiles from Judah in Babylon from the day they were defeated and deported there. But God has a plan regards their future which is a long term hope vv12-14a which involves saying to his people through his true prophet Jeremiah, who is still in Jerusalem/Judea when he sends this message via the then King Zedekiah of Judah’s two envoys who were dispatched to King Nebuchadnezzar, in what today we would call the diplomatic pouch, which was a safe way for Jeremiah to know that this important message from God would get through to his people who at that time desperately needed to hear the truth from the God of Israel. This is what the Lord Almighty himself wanted the exiles in Babylon to hear.

“Well actually, in spite of what you think, believe or feel, the truth of the matter is that, I am available! So come to me, come to Papa. And be warned, Do not listen to those lying false prophets and diviners who claim to be speaking for me but are not.”

The exiles had a number of false prophets who were a part of the group that had been carried into exile from Jerusalem and Judea in 597BC vv8-9 &15-23... These guys were mere dreamers and more, liars, adulterers, false witnesses who did not hear from God. And their message was always along the lines of a rosy prediction that the exiles will very soon be returning to their homeland. Their deceptive message could only do one thing and that is to create havoc among the exiles.

God is not the author of such lies and deception that creates such havoc. The Bible tells us that Satan, the devil is the author and creator of such lies, deception and any associated havoc. No wonder that God in his desire to protect his people from unholy sinful false prophets and their lies and deception judges them so harshly which has its basis in the Law of Moses Deuteronomy 18:14-22. Such prophets were to be put to death v20. And God was proclaiming this same judgment on the false prophets with the exiles in Babylon. The LORD even names them, their sins and says how they are going to die in Jeremiah 29:20-23. These false prophets reaped what they sowed for they were unrepentant sinners who did not call on God and pray to him or be listened to by God, for their sin served to separate them from God because with sin and deception having captured their heart the very thing that you need to seek God with, in its entirety....

<sup>10</sup> This is what the Lord says: ‘When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfill my good promise to bring you back to this place.

<sup>11</sup> For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. <sup>12</sup> **Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.** <sup>13</sup> **You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.** <sup>14</sup> **I will be found by you,**’ declares the Lord, and will bring you back from captivity.

The Lord God Almighty, desires that his people, on reception of his true plan of prosperous peace which gives them hope and a future, that they would then wholeheartedly turn to Him, calling on and praying to him, seeking him so that he might be found and that they would know therefore that they’ve been listened to, heard by God. And if you are thinking to yourself I’ve heard of this pattern before somewhere in scripture – you’d be right!

Jesus said in Matthew 7

<sup>7</sup> 'Ask and it will be given to you;

seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you.

<sup>8</sup> For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.

But, in order to seek and find God with "all your heart" we need to have a heart that is clean and right with God. What it is that prevents our heart from being right with God is rebellion, unbelief and unconfessed sin. Today you might want to ask yourself have you ever sought to know your future in any way apart from asking God. Just as Israel was warned in Deuteronomy 18:9-13 the preceding verses that relate and flow into the section about putting false prophets who speak in the names of other God's to death v20.

Have you ever been to, read and believed or listened to a modern day diviner or false prophet. What I am talking about here is the likes of reading and pinning your hopes on a horoscope or astrology? Visiting a fortune teller, looking into a crystal ball, reading tea leaves or palm-reading. Have you used or taken part in any occult practice such as contacting or visiting a psychic, a medium, a clairvoyant or spiritist, have you attempted in any way to interpret omens, through the likes of a ouji board, a pendulum or rune stones? Have you experimented with contacting the dead or using spirit guides, clairvoyance or dowsing? Or turned to other human philosophies, religions and spiritualities thereby acknowledging the god or spirit behind them which is not of Heavenly Father, Christ or the Holy Spirit.

No good comes to us as Christians from being involved in such things because they are hostile to the Christian faith and God's word of truth. Such things are lies and are not from God, his truth and word. Such things do not provide true hope, let alone a future for us as far as God is concerned- Far from it! Such things can in fact add to, or make you suffer emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually because you've opened your heart to the unholy presence behind such things to come on in and live in your heart, mind so that you can even be controlled spiritually by it.

If you want to have a whole clean heart that's right with God to be able to call out to him, seek and find him with regards to your hope and future then you must first of all acknowledge these things for what they are, sin and rebellion, authored by Satan, and once you can do that then you are to renounce them and turn to God in repentance seeking Christ's forgiveness,

and deliverance from any occult or ungodly spiritual influence that would bind you and keep you from knowing, accepting and believing the truth when you hear it. These things will keep you bound, but, I have good news from Jesus' himself today,

Luke 4 <sup>18</sup> 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, <sup>19</sup> to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.'

When you are free from the bondage of your sin, death, Satan and all unbelief, your heart will be primed and ready to call on God in prayer, seeking and finding him and his truth for you in your particular life situation and as one of his people, you will know of God's plan to prosper you with internal peace and his plan to give you hope and a future. Closing story: Jim Stockdale was the highest ranking US naval officer held as a prisoner of war during the Vietnam conflict. He was held captive for more than seven years, tortured more than 20 times in a prison nick named the Hanoi Hilton. After his release he rose to the rank of Admiral in the US navy. So you would think that he would have some idea about having hope and a future. Stockdale spoke of his experiences to James C. Collins who published his comments in the book 'Good to Great'. Stockdale said that "I never lost faith in the end of the story, I never doubted not only that I would get out, but also that I would prevail in the end and turn the experience into the defining event of my life, which, in retrospect, I would not trade."

When asked, he was quick to say who didn't get out of the Hanoi Hilton, Stockdale replied "Oh, that's easy, the optimists. Oh, they were the ones who said, 'We're going to be out by Christmas.' And Christmas would come, and Christmas would go. Then they'd say, 'We're going to be out by Easter.' And Easter would come, and Easter would go. And then Thanksgiving, and then it would be Christmas again. And they died of a broken heart."

Here is the paradox in Stockdale's own words: "This is a very important lesson. You must never confuse faith that you will prevail in the end—which you can never afford to lose—with the discipline to confront the most brutal facts of your current reality, whatever they might be."

In one sense, with regard to hope, the optimists here were like the false Israelite prophets in Babylon. Both groups were putting God on a timetable and telling themselves that certain opportunities were “meant to be” such as their imminent release from captivity. With regards to having hope and a future you can’t dictate to God like that, which is actually a desire to limit God to your own size and making according to your own futile thinking, beliefs and human fragility. That’s a prime example of how not to seek and find God because you are clearly not seeking God “with all your heart” as the Lord commands’, instead you’ve tried to put him in a box of your own making. Therefore, it’s difficult to succeed in finding The LORD, to be prospered with the ‘shalom’ of inner peace and God’s plan to give us hope and a future.

If you are discouraged by the current situation or your life’s circumstances, And this could be about a relationship or family issues, finding a job, work, your current level of income or something else... you fill in the gap with what it is that is pertinent to your life situation right now... Whatever the discouragement is that is currently working in your life, causing you to worry and lose hope because of what you personally deem to be the ultimate satisfactory future plan for yourself, the plan that has not yet eventuated. If this is so in your life right now then the challenge here is that, I will not succumb to the same temptation as in the case of the optimists in the Hanoi Hilton or the false prophets who lived amongst the exiles in Babylon, where in effect, you put God on a timetable.

You cannot put God in a box like that, but instead I encourage you with this: if the Almighty has our heart then the LORD is walking with you and me and not only that, He has a plan for our lives, a good plan that in the first instance prospers us with Shalom, the peaceful blessing for our heart, mind and spirit no matter what is happening in our external world. So what is our faithful response to be?

I believe it is this; I am not to worry about the what, who, where, how, and when of the fulfilment of the plan. What I am required to do is this; I am simply to be patient, to keep prayerfully seeking God while walking with an open and righteous heart, fully given over to God each and every day of my life, and as I do, I know that everything is going to work out in the end...

**For that is our hope in God for the future!**